

HYPERION MINIATURES

CÉZANNE

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THE HYPERION PRESS
LONDON • PARIS • NEW YORK

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

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NEW YORK, N. Y.



MADAME CÉZANNE IN THE RED IRMCHUR *Detail*
Bertheim de Villers Coll. Paris

CÉZANNE

“THE contour eludes me!” Cézanne would often exclaim in his unceasing struggle to attain a perfect synthesis of colour and form. This perpetual pursuit of the impossible led to many discoveries and gave rise to Cubism and to the modern schools of painting, which transcend both form and colour, and grow more and more abstract, striving to convey an order of truth that cannot be expressed.



THE GREAT BATHERS

Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Born at Aix-en-Provence on January 19, 1839, Paul Cézanne was the son of a hatter who later became a prosperous banker and gave his son, the eldest of three children, a liberal education. At the age of thirteen, Paul met the twelve year old Emile Zola who went to the same school, the College Bourbon of Aix. The friendship, which had a decisive influence on Cézanne's life and career, lasted until middle age.

Cézanne began painting in adolescence and was permitted to attend art classes organized by the Museum of his native town, where he showed some talent and once won the second prize for drawing. His father wanted him to take his degree in law and after passing the baccalaureate, Cézanne, urged by



BATHERS
Paris City Collection



A MODERN OLYMPIA or THE BATHERS Lecomte Collection, Paris

Zola, persuaded his parents to let him continue his studies at the Faculty in Paris, where Zola lived with his mother. Paul returned to Aix twice before he finally settled down in a studio near the Bastille.

In the meantime, he had met Pissarro and Guillaumin, upon whose advice he attempted to enter the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which refused to admit him, finding his painting talent inadequate.

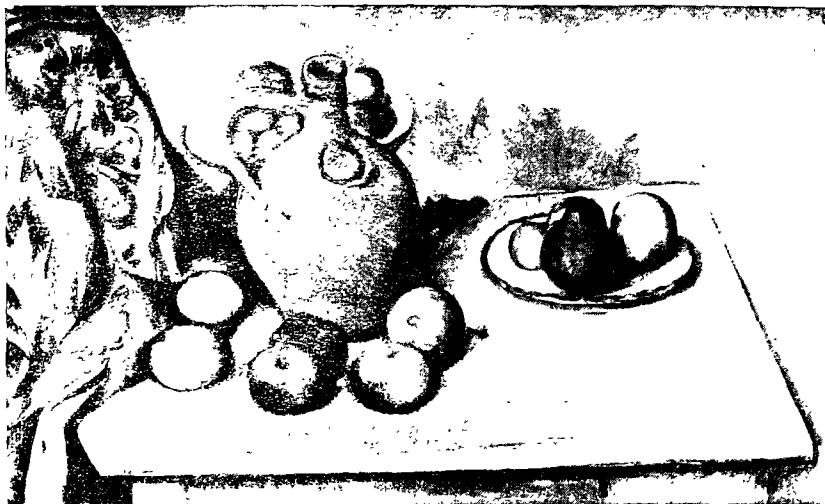
He thereupon began to work in his own way, studying the masters at the



MOTHER AND CHILD. Formerly Peltier Coll. Paris

Louvre, particularly Rubens, but neither copying nor imitating them. He painted violently, spreading dark, thick colours with a palette knife on canvases he often gashed in despair, and lived as violently, heeding no one, not even Zola who attempted to remonstrate but was most undeservedly snubbed.

For all his independence and contempt of the established opinions in art, Cézanne in 1866 tried to gain admittance to the Salon, but both of the works he presented were, to his utter indignation, rejected. The faithful Zola, who was already well known, took up the pen in *L'Événement* to defend his friend



STILL LIFE WITH A BLUE DRAPERY. *Private Collection*

and attack the Academicians, which served at least to put Cézanne's name into the limelight.

In 1867 Cézanne married at Aix. The war of 1870 did not affect him ; he went South and continued to paint.

In 1872, the influence of Pissarro and his friends whose aims were wholly new became evident in the painting of Cézanne. This group, chief of whom were Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Pissarro and Guillaumin, gained fame, or rather notoriety, in 1874, when the critics seized upon the title of a canvas *Impression* exhibited by Claude Monet, and fastened the name in derision to the whole movement.

The Impressionists considered light an element distinct from colour and form, an object in itself. Instead of constructing landscapes in the studio, they painted directly from nature, in the open air. Colours were divided into their primary components which, when set side by side in small, light touches, are recomposed by the eye, from a certain distance, into purer and more varied shades than those which come out of the paint-tube. Neither are contours definite and geometrical, because the eye, dazzled by the pervading light, sees them fragmented and vague. The Impressionists thus broke away from tradition and created a rendering of vision entirely their own.

Although shy and solitary by nature, Cézanne formed part of the group and exhibited together with the others in 1874. He bore his share of the critics' sarcasms which were particularly biting where he was concerned. His manner, however, differs in no small measure from that of his fellow Impressionists with whom he ceased to exhibit after 1877.

Cézanne's paint is dry and compact, the surface dull, the contours clearly defined, and the colours are never broken up into myriads of tiny touches. He is Impressionist in the lightness of his canvases and his love of the open air. But while the works of Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and the others seem to have cost no trouble to the artists but effortlessly to have dawned upon the canvas, Cézanne's painting bears all the signs of the artist's struggle and appears as though hewn out of hard, rebellious rock.

After the Impressionist exhibitions, Cézanne began to acquire popularity of a sort and he now had the opportunity of painting the portraits of several people. Hitherto, only his family and Zola had consented to sit for him. He worked very slowly and exacted absolute stillness from his models (while Renoir would let them walk about as they pleased), although what he strove after was not a complete likeness but an objective creation of form and colour as defined by planes. What chiefly annoyed him was that neither people nor flowers, nor even inanimate objects would "keep still," and while to Monet the play of light which causes this Protean change was a source of joy, to Cézanne it was an endless torment. He solved the problem by painting from paper flowers in which he would absorb himself for weeks, in the end finding them as faded as real ones but giving them on his canvas the life they had never had.

The Salon continued to ignore Cézanne until 1882 when he obtained admission for a small portrait through a friend in the jury, the painter Guillemet. Likewise the Universal Exhibition of 1889 accepted a painting of Cézanne's only upon the insistence of Choquet, a friend and patron whose portrait he had painted. Cézanne made a show of not caring and despising the slights of his judges (most of whom are now almost forgotten) and insulted them in the strongest terms, but in truth he felt his isolation deeply. He buried himself at Aix where, in spite of the comparative wealth left him by his father, he lived in the most undignified squalor; nothing mattered to him but his painting.

As often happens in France, it was a foreign country that first honoured the artist. He was invited to exhibit at Brussels, in 1890, by a group of independent painters, the XX, among whom were James Ensor and Theo van Rysselberghe. Cézanne sent a landscape, a group of bathers which he later destroyed and the *Chaumiére at Auvers-sur-Oise*.

Recognition was coming, but very slowly. In 1895, after the Ministry of Fine Arts had rejected half the pictures bequeathed to the Luxembourg Museum by Caillebotte (a fellow Impressionist and collector), among which were three Cézannes, the art dealer and publisher Vollard organized an Exhibition of the artist's works in his gallery at 39 Rue Laffitte. All the pictures were contributed by Cézanne himself, as so far he had sold but few. This exhibition proved to be the start of celebrity for the painter. Cézanne, however, remained as morose, irritable and unsociable as ever, snapping at amateurs who came all the way to Aix to admire his works.

He sometimes took ten years to paint a picture ; often after months and months of struggling he would finally give up, wreaking vengeance by furiously slashing the canvas with a knife. It is no wonder that Zola, from whom Cézanne had definitely become estranged, used him as a model for his portrait of Lantier, the failure, in "L'Oeuvre". Most of his friends considered Cézanne as just that, an embittered failure. But Cézanne did not care. Without being indifferent to success he was, nevertheless, chiefly preoccupied with the pursuit of his elusive ideal and bent on achieving his own truth. This lay beyond the precision of drawing and detail, in the reality of contour and plane as defined by colour itself and by the relation of the object to its surroundings. He depicted strictly what he saw, and if some of his still-life pieces appear out of focus, it is, as we know, because he often placed the objects on the floor, viewing them from his height.

Before Cézanne, most artists believed that a still-life had to be a collection of objects either original or beautiful in themselves. Copper vases, translucent china, iridescent game or fish, prize fruit and sumptuous flowers were usually arranged on lace tablecloths with a background of polished wood or shining brocade. Cézanne was the first to use humble and everyday objects ; a bottle, a jug, a couple of apples on a plain, crumpled napkin sufficed to set the problem of reality. His Bathers were not painted from real models, who irritated him by their lack of stillness and silence, but from earlier studies and even from picture postcards. Only his landscapes were painted entirely from nature, and that is perhaps why they touch us more deeply than most of his other works ; another reason is that he was in love with his Provence and that the *Jas de Bouffan*, the *Mont Sainte Victoire* and *L'Estaque* were part of his very soul.

Cézanne died on October 22, 1906, of a seizure which came upon him while he was working on a landscape out in the rain. He had achieved recognition and even fame during his lifetime, but he died unsatisfied ; in his eyes the truth he strove for had ceaselessly escaped him and his work did not attain the heights of his ideal.

ANDRÉ LECLERC



THE VILLAGE OF GARDANNE

Brooklyn Museum, New York

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STILL LIFE. Washington, D.C.
National Gallery of Art, Chester Dale Coll. (Loan)



THE BASKET OF APPLES. Courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Coll.



SELF-PORTRAIT IN A BOWLER HAT

G. Bernheim de Villers Coll. Paris

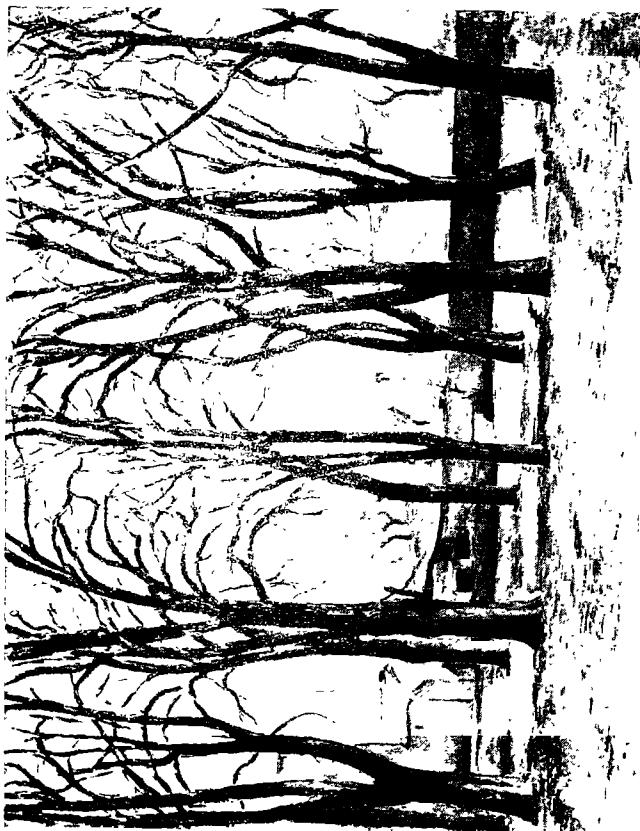
On View at the Art Institute of Chicago



PORTRAIT OF HENRI GASQUET

Bignou Gallery, New York

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CHESTNUT TREES AT JAS DE BOUFFAN.

The Frick Collection, New York



THE SEA AT L'ESTAQUE. Paul Cézanne Coll. Paris



THE BLACK MARBLE CLOCK. G. Wildenstein Collection



STILL LIFE John T. Spaulding Collection
Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



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FLOWERS IN A GREEN VASE
Carroll S. Tyson Jr. Collection



THE BLUE VASE
Musée du Louvre, Paris



MADAME CÉZANNE. Philadelphia
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Museum of Art



PORTRAIT OF GUSTAVE GEFFROY
Lecomte-Pellerin Collection, Paris



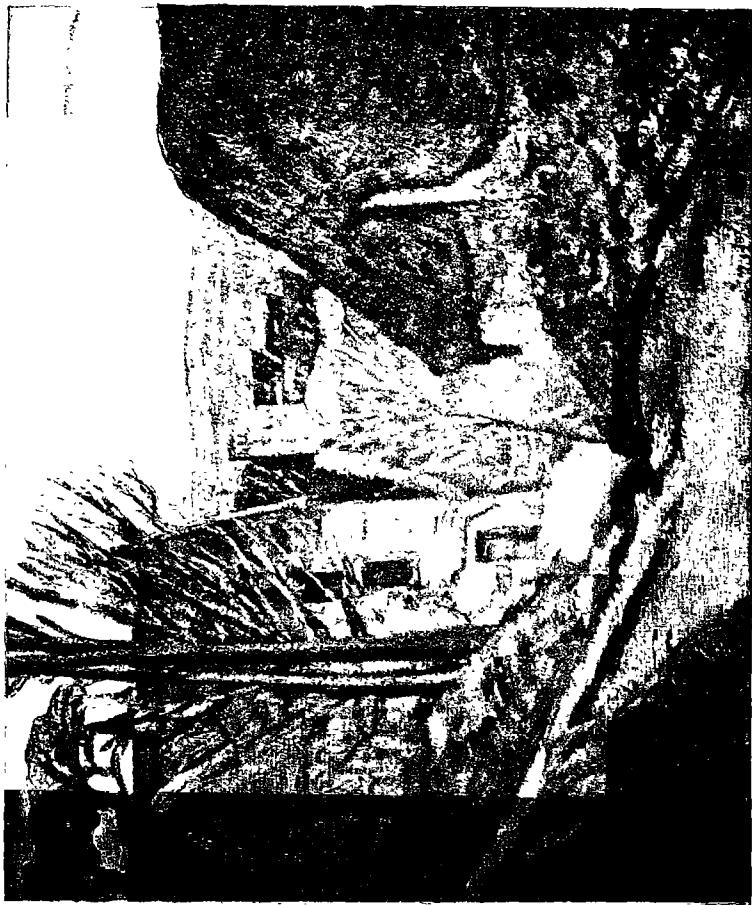
THE BATHERS Private Collection



THE BATHERS. Private Collection



THE RUSTIC HOUSE Howard Young Collection, New York



THE HOUSE OF THE HANGED MAN. Musée du Louvre, Paris



CARNIVAL

30] Museum of Modern Occidental Art, Moscow



YOUNG ITALIAN GIRL
Coll. Dr. and Mrs. Harry Bakwin



THE MAN IN BLUE OVERALLS

Private Collection



PORTRAIT OF AMBROISE VOLLARD

Formerly Vollard Collection, Paris

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FIELDS AT BELLEVUE Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D C



MONT SAINTE VICTOIRE. National Gallery, London. Coll. Mrs. Courtauld (Loan)



UNCLE DOMINIC
The Frick Collection, New York



AUNT MARIE
Courtesy of the City Art Museum, St. Louis



PORTRAIT OF CÉZANNE'S FATHER
Wertheim Collection



MADAME CÉZANNE IN THE GREENHOUSE

Clark Collection

[39]



[40] PORTRAIT OF BOYER
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa



MADAME CÉZANNE SEWING
Durand-Ruel Galleries, New York



111. C. VARDI VYRS. Musée du Louvre, Paris



THE CARD PLAYERS The Museum of Modern Art, New York



THE MAN WITH THE PIPE

[44]

Formerly Pellerin Coll. Paris



PORTRAIT OF VICTOR CHOCQUET
Formerly V. Rothschild Collection, London



BATHERS. Private Collection

